

XXXVIII.—*Ornithological Notes in the New Hebrides.*

By A. M. FARQUHAR, Captain R.N.*

HAVING spent five months of 1899, viz. from May to October, in the New Hebrides, I think some notes of my cruises in those waters may be of interest to the readers of 'The Ibis.' Roughly speaking, these islands lie between latitudes 15° and 20° South and longitude 166° and 170° East. They are volcanic in nature, the soil consisting of disintegrated lava and coral. There are at least four active volcanoes in the group. All the islands are mountainous, some of the peaks being nearly 6000 feet high. The largest of the islands are Espiritu Santo and Mallicollo; here the natives are still cannibals, which adds some excitement to bird-collecting. I was much assisted in my ornithological pursuits by the officers of H.M.S. 'Wallaroo' and by my steward, James Heaver, who helped me with the skinning.

Arriving at Fila, in the island of Efate, on the 10th of May, I landed that evening. Not many birds were to be seen, except *Artamus melanoleucus*, great numbers of which were hawking round the higher branches of a huge banyan. I came across these Wood-Swallows in various parts of the group; they have a curious habit of sitting in a row along a bare branch, and I generally found them infested with a parasitical fly.

From Efate I went to South-west Bay, Mallicollo, where we stayed some time. The forest here abounds in the fine Pigeon *Globicera pacifica*, the loud booming note of which may be heard at a great distance. When looking for small birds, I found great difficulty in preventing the natives taking me after these Pigeons, as they could not understand why I should trouble about such insignificant little things as Honey-eaters, Flycatchers, *Zosteropes*, &c., when there was bigger game about. *Globicera pacifica* has an extraordinary large lump at the base of the bill. Later on, at Eromanga, I shot a good many Pigeons of this genus, and I then noticed

* [These notes were apparently intended as an introduction to Dr. Sharpe's account of Capt. Farquhar's collection of birds (above, p. 337), but did not reach us until after Dr. Sharpe's paper had been published.—EDD.]

that the Eromanga bird differs considerably in colouring and that the lump on the bill is much smaller than in *Globicera pacifica*; it has now been described as *G. farquhari* (above, p. 349).

It was at South-west Bay that I first made the acquaintance of *Merula mareensis*, being attracted by its alarm-note, which is very like that of our Common Blackbird; it has another note, which may best be described as "siss, siss." It was the only bird of the kind I saw there, though I afterwards found it fairly common at Hog Harbour, Espiritu Santo; it was always extremely wild, and I only shot one during my stay in the New Hebrides. Five others were snared for me by the natives; all six specimens proved unfortunately to be hens. I obtained three or four clutches of eggs, all two in number.

A pretty little green Pigeon (*Ptilopus greyi*) was common; also *Chalcophaps chrysochlora*, which is generally to be found feeding on the ground in the native clearings. The inhabitants catch them by means of an ingenious snare constructed of twigs, with a noose made of fine fibre. *Macropygia rufa* was frequently met with at South-west Bay, though not in such numbers as in cultivated portions of the New Hebrides. Twice, while in the islands, a bright yellow dove of this genus was described to me, but though an officer of H.M.S. 'Wallaroo' once came across it, I failed to obtain a specimen; indeed, by all accounts, it is very rare.

Butorides stagnatilis and *Demiegretta sacra* were common along the edges of the mangrove lagoon, and I found the nests of the latter on a small rocky island, placed on the ground, but it was too early for eggs. As I had come to South-west Bay in H.M.S. 'Wallaroo' for the purpose of punishing the natives implicated in the murder of a trader, it was not safe to stray very far from the ship. My excursions, consequently, were restricted to below an 800-ft. level; indeed I found it difficult while in the islands to get above this height—not, as a rule, on account of the natives, but generally owing to want of time and to the density of the forests and the danger of fever when camping out.

From South-west Bay I went to Pangkumu, east coast of

Mallicollo, where I landed with some of the other officers to shoot ducks in a shallow lagoon. We got a few *Anas superciliosa* and one *Porphyrio smaragdinus*, a handsome Gallinule. Mr. F. Paton, a son of the veteran missionary, heads the mission, and gave me much assistance and information about the natives, who are very wild and treacherous. Among other unpleasant customs, including cannibalism, they have one of burying alive their very old and very sick relatives. Several smiling murderers were pointed out to me, who would have made as good bird-guides as any others.

On the 26th of May I was at Eromanga engaged in surveying Polenia Bay. *Globicera farquhari* is very common here, and we shot a number of this fine Pigeon, and I procured a single specimen of *Petræca similis*, shot by a native boy with a blunt-headed arrow; later on I obtained two specimens of the nearly allied *P. ambrymensis*, but both species are bush-skulkers and not easy to shoot.

The 17th of June found me on the south coast of Espiritu Santo, at the entrance of the Sarrakatè river, up which I made an expedition. The scenery was lovely as we pulled up between the steep and densely wooded banks, the tops of the giant trees being completely laced over with a thick covering of convolvulus, which prevented the rays of even the tropical sun at high noon from reaching the ground. Great bushes of scarlet hibiscus made splashes of colour against the dark green, but birds were few; an occasional Pigeon crossed high overhead, and *Hirundo tahitica* was hawking over the surface of the water, while now and again we disturbed a Bittern from the mangroves. Three miles brought us to plantations, where bird-life was more plentiful, and I obtained specimens of *Aplonis rufipennis*, another kind of *Zosterops* (*Z. griseonota*), *Collocalia fuciphaga*, and *Halcyon julia* (specimens of this Kingfisher I found differed a good deal in the neck-markings). In some parts of Espiritu Santo I found *Lalage flavotincta* fairly common; it is a handsome little bird, with a breast of most delicate yellow.

Early in July we were back at Efate, and an expedition to a neighbouring plantation produced for me four specimens

of the charming little Grass-Finch, *Erythrura cyaneifrons*, which was feeding in flocks on the seeds of a tall grass growing in a coffee plantation. I afterwards shot this bird at Dip Point, Ambrym.

After an absence of three weeks from the islands, I returned on the 24th of July to Dillon Bay, Eromanga, where I got three specimens of *Diaphoropterus nævius*, a black and-white bird called by the natives "Oovao," but could hear nothing of "*Turdus albifrons*," although I made many enquiries.

While there I went for a picnic with the missionary, Mr. Robertson, and his charming daughters. We lunched in a beautiful spot close to a stream. A stone's throw away, on the other side, Mr. Robertson pointed out a large rock, on which, after the murder of his predecessor, Mr. Gordon, the natives had placed the body, making a small chip on the rock at his head and feet, as a reminder of his size, he being a very tall man. His wife was clubbed at the same time while in her garden at the top of the cliff opposite, along the face of which I noticed a pair of Owls flying about. These did not come within shot, so I could not determine them for certain, but fancy they were *Strix lulu*, as I shot an Owl of this species later on in Espiritu Santo.

The second week of September found me at Hog Harbour, Espiritu Santo, where I remained some days surveying; it proved the best collecting-ground that I visited. Here there are no traders, and a missionary-station has but lately been established. The neighbouring tribes are generally at war one with another, and the people are very wild. I noticed that they wore bunches of feathers in their hair, almost their only clothing; these bunches were artistically softened in colour by being smoked. I had hoped to get specimens of the Megapode here, but though I offered large quantities of tobacco, the natives failed to trap one, and the birds, which inhabit the thickest bush, are very difficult to shoot, as they run on hearing the slightest noise. I obtained, however, about six of their eggs, quite fresh, and saw their laying-places. The eggs are deposited in the damp decaying wood of one of the fallen giants of the forest, the heat set up by fermentation

hatching them. All the places which I saw had already been rifled, so I was unable to make any observations as to the position of the eggs. I obtained two good specimens of a brilliant little Kingfisher, which has since been named *Halcyon farquhari* (suprà, p. 339, Pl. VII.), and two of a new *Cacomantis*, since named *C. schistaceigularis*. One of the officers had shot a bird of this species on a former visit to Hog Harbour, so luckily I was able to show the skin to my native hunter, who, knowing the whistle of the bird in the forest, led me to these two. Here I first became aware that *Pachycephala chlorura* and *Eopsaltria cucullata* are cock and hen, or, as my native called them, "man-bird" and "woman-bird," of the same species, now named *Pachycephala intacta*. He brought me also their nest and eggs, three in number, of a red cream-colour, with dark brown and faint grey markings: 2.5×2 centimetres. The nest was made of rootlets and vine-tendrils, slightly bound together with spiders' web, and had an inside diameter of $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches, an outside diameter of $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches, an inside depth of $1\frac{5}{8}$ inches, outside $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. It was placed on a low tree. I also got the eggs of *Chalcophaps chrysochlora*, which were of a cream-white: 2.8×2.1 centimetres. The nest was the usual platform of slight twigs, about 12 feet from the ground. While here I came across the nest and young of *Colocalia uropygialis*. The nests were like very shallow half-saucers of green moss stuck against the side of a huge coral erratic in the middle of the forest. All the eggs were hatched out, but I saw pure white fragments of the egg-shells lying at the base of the rock.

I spent a day or two in the Banks Islands; which are practically a northern continuation of the New Hebrides, from which they can be seen on a clear day. Oddly enough, a totally different species of *Glyciphila* (*G. notabilis*) inhabits this group, or at any rate Vanua Lava, the largest of its islands. It seemed quite common, as was also *Hypocharmosyna palmarum*, which had paired and was feeding in the flowering trees, especially among the blossoms of the custard-apple. Unfortunately my visit to this group was a very short one, and I was only able to land once for collecting purposes.

What struck me most about the birds of the New Hebrides was their extreme wildness, nearly all have to be stalked with the greatest care. I expect, when the islands were more densely populated, small birds were much hunted with bows and arrows for food. As an instance of the decrease of population, the island of Aneityun had by census a population of 3500 in 1859, to-day it has barely 500; Futuna by census a population of 970 in 1870, to-day barely 300.

It is sad to think of these fair islands being swept of their inhabitants; one is inclined to ask if these people were not more comfortable in their days of cannibalism and heathendom than now, when to their other vices they have added those of the white man and his diseases, which have, I fear, taken a quicker hold than the tenets of christianity, in spite of the earnest work of courageous missionaries, to whose kindness and assistance I owe so much.

XXXIX.—*Description of some Nests and Eggs from New Guinea.* By D. LE SOUËF, C.M.Z.S., Melbourne.

MANUCODIA ATRA. (Glossy-mantled Manucode.)

This bird is found generally over New Guinea and also on the adjacent islands, and is especially plentiful in the southern districts. They seem to keep in the dense scrub and are very shy, but can easily be brought up by imitating their drawn-out plaintive whistle. A nest of this bird was found by Mr. C. Barnard on October 6th, 1899, on Sariba Island, which is about four miles from the S.E. coast of New Guinea. The nest was situated about 25 feet from the ground, in a large mangrove-tree near the beach, the water at high tide surrounding the tree. When taking the nest the birds flew about in evident distress, but did not attack the intruder in any way. Mr. Barnard saw another bird on Nov. 2nd carrying twigs in her bill, apparently to build her nest with, but he lost sight of her in the thick scrub.

The nest (fig. 1, p. 613) is an open structure, being composed